Special Issue of *Mortality* (17/2, 2012), 'Music and Death': Introduction

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Music is generally considered to be a life-giving force – animating, bringing about transformation, and generally making things happen. Consequently, it tends to be more commonly associated with life than with death. However, of course, life and death are two sides of the same coin and it seems only natural that people should turn to music for answers when death enters their lives. During these critical episodes, characterised by uncertainty and vulnerability, musical experiences can serve valuable stabilising and regenerative functions; as most people would readily acknowledge, music has a pronounced ability to summon complexes of emotion and memory to the conscious foreground (sometimes from deep recesses of the mind), helping to reaffirm personal identities and values and to clarify the nature of relationships with significant others in life, be they dead, dying, or in relatively good health. In short, music helps people to reestablish order from out of the death-induced disarray, so that they can begin to formulate effective strategies for moving forwards into the next phases of their lives. Although this relationship between music and death – the former acting as a countermeasure to offset the psychological effects of the latter – is a particularly conspicuous theme, recurring throughout much of this issue, there are however many other ways in which music and death are brought into close association in human life. The eight articles presented here examine a host of different music/death associations, addressing their appearance in everyday life, the media, clinical therepeutic contexts, post-death rituals, and other performance events.

The first two articles consider how music can affect the lives of people who are approaching death. Tia DeNora interprets poignant moments of listening together, shared by family members within the sphere of everyday life. Particular pieces, styles or musicians encourage memories to surface, reconnecting individuals with specific phases in their pasts. As DeNora demonstrates, with each subsequent revisiting of the music fresh associations are established, which may well be summoned in future listenings – right up to the person's death and beyond, in the listening experiences of the bereaved. Depending on the constellation of emotions and interactions of the particular moment, a listening experience can be a source of pleasure – the precious gem at the heart of a 'good time' – or sadness, when feelings of loss (impending or already passed) overwhelm any sense of pleasure in continuance. DeNora shows how responses are often at odds with what listeners are expecting.

Although music evidently does not work in the same way as other medicines, there are contexts in which musical activities are prescribed by those working in palliative care, administered under the guidance of people sensitive to music's complex actions. Drawing from their own experiences, music therapists Bob Heath and Jane Lings discuss the benefits of active musical creativity – in particular, songwriting. For people whose feelings of purposefulness and self-worth might otherwise be dwindling, song creation provides goals and pride but, much more than this, it often engenders personal transformation; through the processes of creating lyrics and fitting them within pre-established frameworks, people give structure to their thoughts and reach conclusions about what has been important in their lives. Using the medium of song, people are also able to express sentiments that cannot easily be spoken and, by combining tightly ordered melody, rhythm, and lyric, their finished works are often perceived as rounded final statements, in which the individual's

identity, thoughts and emotions are somehow imbedded. As Heath and Lings show, many of these songs outlive their creators, occupying important places in the lives of the bereaved.

Music's effectiveness as a representational memorial is further discussed by Wolfgang Marx (in relation to the modern Requiem) and by Brian Parsons (in relation to the music of funeral services in the UK). Wolfgang Marx identifies a shift from the personal to the universal in the Requiem; the 20th Century Requiems of Delius, Ligeti, and others refer to the deaths of large groups of people, generally to the victims of man-made calamities: the First and Second World Wars, Hiroshima, 9/11, and more. Including representations of fear, anger, and pain, Requiem performances frequently foreground the role of prevention: by allowing the audience to experience the presumed emotions of the dying in a diluted form and by recounting the details of their horrific experiences – exploiting the special communicative abilities of both music and words – the Requiem is intended to make listeners determined that such unhappy deaths never happen again. While the Requiem has come to represent the deaths of the many, conversely, Parsons identifies a general trend towards personalisation in the music at funerals in the UK, and a parallel move towards using a combination of religious and secular musics to provide a fuller representation of identity. Parsons demonstrates how the bereaved often choose particular pieces of music for their perceived representational fit to the deceased's personality, with a small repertoire of songs standing out as firm favourites, widely recognised as projecting a positive outlook regarding transition from this life and as providing effective consolation for the bereaved.

Simon Mills and James Burns detail the use of music within large-scale post-death rituals in South Korea and Eweland (West Africa) respectively. In both cases, a wide variety of musical forms and styles are performed and music features throughout much of the proceedings, delineating ritual structures and determining the emotional contour experienced by participants. Over the course of proceedings, a wealth of contrasting emotions are evoked through music; during certain episodes, the musicians encourage participants to delve deeply into their loss and express anguish openly and, at other times, they promote exuberant laughter and dance. Contrasting acutely with the musical practices of the UK crematorium service and the Requiem performance, here, music is designed to stimulate an active whole-body-and-mind involvement and a thorough cathartic release of pent-up energies. At the same time, of course, music serves its ubiquitous role of bringing parties together to experience shared feelings and values. Although the musical choices played in UK funerals may at times be considered to engender a bringing together of the bereaved, the spirit of the deceased, and God, this union tends to remain implicit; in the Eweland and Korean contexts discussed by Mills and Burns, however, music's critically important role in summoning these parties and bringing them into negotiation is explicit and pronounced. As in the previous articles, musical performance (and particularly song) often serves a representational role in these rituals, communicating details about the life, personality, affiliations, and status of the deceased and also about other relationships in the community. And, yet again, music is seen to contribute immeasurably to the overal ritual goal of reestablishing order following death's disruption.

Turning away from further consideration of music's therepeutic capabilities, this special issue closes with two articles that instead address another area of 'Music and Death'-related research, considering how people respond to the deaths of musically creative individuals. Mieko Kanno explores how the absence of the composer affects the performers' interpretation and the audiences' reception of musical works. Of course, in the case of most pieces in the canonic classical repertoire,

the composer died long ago; the composer exists only in so much as their identities and emotional worlds are imbedded in their musical works, temporarily resurrected during the performance event. In her article, Kanno argues that the perception of the composer as being dead yet still alive in the musical work has become an attitudinal default to the extent that it even informs people's approach to pieces by living composers. She demonstrates how this condition is perpetuated through established codes of performance practice wherein, all too often, from the outset of the rehearsal process to the final performace, the living breathing composers of the present day remain absent – remote and only accessible through their works, much like their dead predecessors.

Concluding this issue, Paula Hearsum assesses responses to the untimely death of the singer Amy Winehouse in July 2011, focusing in particular on the media's handling of the event at the time. She examines the various narratives that were offered by newspaper and magazine journalists as rationalisations of the death and isolates the various themes that were repeatedly forefronted in commentaries, such as her death at the age of 27 (in common with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, and many others). As Hearsum demonstrates, the media coverage of Amy Winehouse's death reveals a great deal about enduring societal values and customs relating to death, journalistic strategies for ensuring favourable public reception, and stereotypes about musicians – specifically, the creative-yet-tortured soul who lives in close proximity to death.